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CHICAGO RIVER BASCULE BRIDGE,
WEST CORTLAND STREET (*West Clybourne Place Bridge*)
Cortland Street crossing North Branch of
the Chicago River
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HAER No. IL-138

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO:
CHICAGO RIVER BASCULE BRIDGE, WEST CORTLAND STREET
(West Clybourn Place Bridge)
Chicago Bridges Recording Project
Spanning North Branch of Chicago River at West Cortland Street
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HAER No. IL-138

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

CHICAGO RIVER BASCULE BRIDGE,
WEST CORTLAND STREET (West Clybourne Place Bridge)
HAER No. IL-138

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Location: West Cortland Street crossing North Branch of the
Chicago River
Chicago, Cook County, Illinois

Date of
Construction: 1901

Builders: Fitzsimons and Connell Company (Substructure);
American Bridge Company, Lassig Plant
(Superstructure).

Engineer: John Ericson, City Engineer

Present Owner: City of Chicago.

Present Use: Highway Bridge. .

Significance: Designated a landmark by the American Society of
Civil Engineers, the Cortland Street Bridge is a
double-leaf bascule span that became in the early
twentieth century the standard for movable bridges
designed by the city engineer of Chicago. The
Cortland Street bridge was the first of this type
and featured electric motors that drove pinion
gears which engaged a rack attached to the end of
each truss. Counterweights on the shore sides of
the bridge counterbalanced the roadway and
superstructure that spanned the river and thus
little power was required to raise or lower the
bridge. When raised, each leaf assumed a nearly
vertical position providing a wide clearance for
vessels plying the river. City engineers designed
the machinery so that the bridge could open within
one minute during calm weather and under three
minutes during windy conditions. (See Daniel L.
Schodek, Landmarks in American Civil Engineering
[Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987], 146-48.)

Historian: Gray Fitzsimons, 1987.

Project
Information: This photographic documentation project of
the bascule bridges crossing the Chicago River was
carried out by Jet Lowe, HAER staff photographer,
in 1987 and followed on the heels of an inventory
of historic engineering and industrial sites in
the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage
Corridor. HAER historian Gray Fitzsimons was
project manager for this undertaking.